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UNCLAS KINGSTON 001814

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR (WBENT)
TRANSPORTATION FOR SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION MINETA'S
OFFICE

E.O. 12958: NA
TAGS: AORC EAIR ELTN EWWT XM XL CA
SUBJECT: RE: WHA CIVAIR: REQUEST FOR INFO ON TRANSPORT
MINISTER PARTICIPATION AT UPCOMING WHTI MEETING

REF: A) STATE 132219
B) 04 KINGSTON 3385
C) KINGSTON 1318
D) KINGSTON 1346
E) KINGSTON 1316
F) KINGSTON 831
G) KINGSTON 1529

¶1. (U) Per reftel A, on July 20 Econoff contacted the office of Minister of Transport and Works Robert Pickersgill. His office confirmed that the Minister would be attending the Western Hemisphere Transportation Initiative (WHTI) meeting to be held in Brasilia, Brazil, August 25-26, 2005. His staff did not indicate whether or not the Minister was interested in a private meeting with Secretary Mineta to discuss bilateral issues, the most relevant of which are outlined below.

¶2. (U) The GOJ is worried with the economic viability of the national airline, Air Jamaica, which is facing heavy debts (ref B) and increasing competition from low-cost carriers (ref C).

¶3. (U) The GOJ is concerned about the implementation of the WHTI and its effect on the ability of tourists to visit the island without passports - the GOJ feels strongly that the new documentation requirements for Americans under the WHTI will have a strongly negative impact on their tourism economy, as visitors turn to Puerto Rico and the Yucatan, which will not have similar documentation requirements in 2006 (refs D and E).

¶4. (U) The Jamaica Civil Aviation Authority (JCAA) has renewed its commitment to providing oversight of aviation safety on the island, following a recent FAA assessment during which Jamaica narrowly avoided a downgrade to Category Two status (ref F).

¶5. (U) The GOJ has been charging a customs user fee on sales of jet fuel to U.S. flagged carriers (American Airlines and Northwest Airlines), but has been waiving the fee for Air Jamaica in light of its precarious financial situation. This exemption of the national carrier is not allowed under the Free Skies agreement. Post has repeatedly brought the problem to the attention of the GOJ, but has received no substantive response in over a year (ref G). There are similar reports from American Airlines (and perhaps other US carriers) that the mandatory security "tax" levied on all tickets is not remitted to the GOJ by Air Jamaica, but rather retained as operating income. This is both a discriminatory trade practice and an underfunding of airport security.

TIGHE